

"Her name's Comfort, Comfort Stanley. Happen she'll be a comfort to you. She's a Devonshire lass. Father was a poor parson—married on nought as parsons do, and left wife and girl to shift for themselves. So she tells me."

"I didn't tell you that!" she flashed out. "Father was a saint. All the moor loved him."

"Well, well," Seth Osborne waved his hand. "We'll not quarrel over it. Saints don't have much truck in this world. They'd best keep from bringing other people into it."

Mrs. Osborne looked from the girl's flushed cheeks to her husband's face. What miracle was this? A poultry maid daring to stand up against Seth, and not getting set to the right about!

Seth smiled a wan little smile. "I'll be glad of your help, Comfort," she said.

And the girl's warm heart went out to Maggie Osborne among the shadows.

Comfort went out into the dusk of the garden that evening. She loved all simple country things. She drew deep

and the milk pail over a time or two, yielded her milk kindly to the deft gentle fingers.

In fruit time it was Comfort who helped to pack ripe strawberries into baskets, and to gather the other small fruits for which the farm was famed.

"She do know how to manage master young lass," one hired man said. "She could wile the bird off the bough."

"She's a born lady, a cut above us," Bess chimed in.

"She do know how to manage master proper. Never a rough word crosses his lips to her."

Indeed, Comfort soon became as much a part of Mossley Farm as if she were a daughter of the house.

She's a handsome little lass, wife," Seth said. "I did a good stroke of business when I took her on at her face value. I don't make any mistakes. The sunshine lass of Mossley Farm, that's what I call her."

"It was Providence sent her," said Mrs. Osborne quietly.



Who will help me count those toes?

breaths of the June roses that were sending up their dewy incense to a pale young moon. It was a delightful change from the drudgery of being mother's help to five small children. There had been a short love idyll, a year of joy and hope, then fate had stepped in to part the lovers.

"I can't believe it! It must be a dream! I know I shall wake up in the attic nursery! Is it really true that I am poultry maid at Mossley Farm—that I have passed muster with the master?"

She raised a white rosebud to her lips, that had last answered to her young lover's kiss, as he bade her what might be a long farewell.

Bess and Letty, the dairymaids were friendly to the new comer.

"You stand by the mistress, and we'll stand by you," Bess said. "She have been sore put upon, she have. The likeliest lass in the countryside, folk do say she was twenty-five years ago, when master wedded her. And look at her now! All her bonnie hair went white when master turned Mr. Arnold from the door!"

Comfort's heart welled over with pity for the sad-eyed mistress of Mossley Farm. Mrs. Osborne neglected none of her duties as a farmer's wife. Her butter took first prize at the show, her poultry repaid her care; but it was as if the spirit had gone out of it all, the spring of life had snapped.

Comfort's abounding energy overflowed into most channels of farm work. She learned to milk, and when Bess was laid up with a bad hand, the most skittish of the Kerry cows, after turning her

"Ay, ay; that's a way of speaking," he ran his fingers through his beard. "Wise folks plays Providence to themselves. It's the fools that lets the chances slip."

Seth Osborne had nipped in the bud the little wifely cares that are the small coins of happiness, and so Maggie, his wife, had dropped them one by one.

But now Comfort had his carpet slippers warming on the hearth, his paper at hand, his pipe ready filled when he set himself down. He took it all in his lordly fashion as the master's due, giving no thanks, but he was secretly flattered by it.

It was Comfort who was the first to notice that after a glance over the paper he laid it aside unread, and pulled hard at his pipe.

"May I have a look at the paper?" she asked one evening.

"Ay, ay!" he gave it to her. "It's rascally poor print they're putting into it. Read me any bits of news you fancy, girl."

After that Comfort read the paper aloud every evening, while Mrs. Osborne knitted, or went to bed early.

One morning Seth Osborne drove off in the buggy. It was not a market day, but no one ventured to ask him where he was going. Late in the evening he returned. They could hear him asking for the hired man in the yard.

He flung himself into the chair, refusing pipe and supper, and presently fell into an uneasy doze.

Mrs. Osborne had gone to her room; she was ailing more than usual on account of the heat.

Comfort was about to follow her, when Osborne woke up and called her back.

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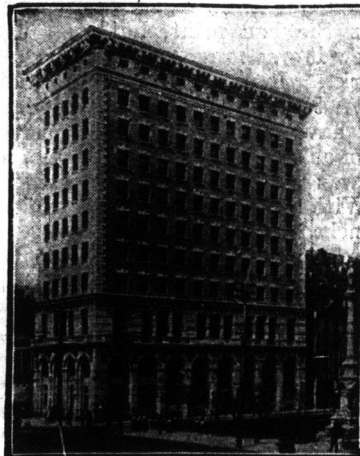
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